

Double Truth? Daniel Hofmann and the Discussion on the Relation of Theology and Philosophy

Roland F. Ziegler

I. Introduction

“Lutheranism and philosophy” is a topic full of tensions. On one hand, there is Luther and his derogatory statements on Aristotle and reason in general. On the other hand, there is not only a history of Aristotelian philosophy in the seventeenth century, but also a philosopher like Hegel who saw himself as a Lutheran philosopher. Is there a Lutheran position on philosophy? Is there a Lutheran approach to philosophy? Historically, there were different positions and approaches. Unlike Roman Catholicism which wedded itself for a long time to Thomistic Aristotelianism, Lutheranism did not make such a judgment. But for a time, Lutherans did philosophize as Aristotelians, a move that seemed quite astonishing in view of Luther’s negative comments on Aristotle and the use of philosophy in theology. Around 1600, there was a change first in the philosophy departments, then also in the departments of theology. Aristotle and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617) were studied, and Aristotelian metaphysics became part of the normative school philosophy. Even before 1600, the Aristotelian method became also the method in theology, and the scheme of the four causes, of form and matter, and Aristotelian logic were used frequently by the Lutheran dogmaticians.¹

In this era of change, there was a controversy at the University of Helmstedt between Daniel Hofmann (1538–1611) and Cornelius Martini (1568–1621), one of the foremost early Aristotelians among Lutheran philosophers. In this paper, I am going to describe Hofmann’s position, then ask if his claim to follow Luther is justified. I will describe the reaction of later Lutheran theologians to Hofmann’s

¹ For philosophy at Lutheran universities, see Walter Sparn, “Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien,” *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts, vol. 4: Das Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation. Nord- und Ostmitteleuropa* (Basel: Schwabe, 2001), 291–606. For the use of Aristotelianism in Lutheran theology, see E. Weber, *Der Einfluss der protestantischen Schulphilosophie auf die orthodox-lutherische Dogmatik* (Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf. [Georg Böhme], 1908); Walter Sparn, *Wiederkehr der Metaphysik: Die ontologische Frage in der lutherischen Theologie des frühen 17. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1976); Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1 (St. Louis, London: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 128–140.

Roland F. Ziegler serves as the Robert D. Preus Professor of Systematic Theology and Confessional Lutheran Studies and Chairman of the Systematic Theology Department at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Indiana. He can be contacted at roland.ziegler@ctsfw.edu.

position, using Jacob Martini and Abraham Calov as examples of Hofmann's position.²

II. The Historical Setting

Daniel Hofmann was a professor at the University of Helmstedt, founded in 1576 by Duke Julius of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel (1528–1589). Duke Julius did not sign the Formula of Concord (FC), and thus the university became an example of a Lutheran church without the Formula of Concord.³ This did not mean that Hofmann was less opposed to Reformed theology. He was involved in extensive polemics with Johannes Piscator (1546–1625) and Rudolph Goclenius (1547–1628).⁴ In this debate, the relationship between philosophy and theology was already a topic. Against Goclenius, Hofmann stated that God cannot be subsumed with other things under a genus and therefore logic does not apply in the same way to God as it does to his creation.⁵ Hofmann was also involved in polemics against Jacob Andreae and Aegidius Hunnius concerning Christology. The doctrine of the omnipresence of the human nature was the theological reason Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel did not sign the Formula of Concord. Hofmann was first a professor of philosophy at Helmstedt from 1576–1578, lecturing on Aristotelian ethics and dialectics (logic). The students even complained: “He philosophizes too much, it's all philosophy with him.”⁶

Cornelius Martini, one of the foremost philosophers of any Lutheran university, and often credited with the revival of metaphysics and the shift from Melancthon and Petrus Ramus (1515–1572) to Aristotle, taught at Helmstedt in the philosophical department and was thus a colleague of Hofmann.⁷ The controversy associated with Hofmann's name takes place at the time and the place of a major philosophical shift among Lutherans. This philosophical shift had also theological consequences. With the revival of metaphysics as ontology (dealing with being *as* being, *ens qua ens*), it becomes a fundamental discipline also

² For the background, cf. Markus Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft: Theologie, Philosophie und gelehrte Konflikte am Beispiel des Helmstedter Hofmannstreits und seiner Wirkungen auf das Luthertum um 1600* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

³ The other German universities that were in Lutheran territories that did not sign the FC were Altdorf (Imperial City of Nürnberg) and Königsberg (Duchy of Prussia).

⁴ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 242.

⁵ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 243.

⁶ Ernst Schlee, *Der Streit des Daniel Hofmanns über das Verhältnis der Philosophie zur Theologie* (Marburg: N. G. Elwertsche Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1862), 4, quoting Ernst Ludwig Theodor Henke, *Georg Calixtus und seine Zeit*, vol. 1 (Halle: Buchh. des Waisenhauses, 1853), 102.

⁷ “Martini gilt als deren eigentlicher Neubegründer auf protestantischem Boden.” Walter Sparr, “Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien,” 561.

for theology. Additionally, Martini claimed that syllogistic argumentation is universally valid, even in theology.⁸

III. Double Truth

The literary beginning of the debate on the use of reason in theology and thus the relationship between theology and philosophy is Hofmann's preface to the doctoral disputation of Caspar Pfaffrad (1562–1622) in 1598.⁹ The disputation's theses focus on God and the person and office of Christ. Hofmann wants to maintain Luther's position, a position opposed to the *feces scholasticae* ("scholastic dregs") and those who peddle the word of God (2 Cor 2:17).

In the preface, Hofmann sees the attack of Satan of his time in the domination of carnal reason and wisdom over the doctrine of faith. But such a reliance leads to error, as Colossians 2:8 shows, and leads to factions. Thus, the early church was right in saying that the philosophers are the patriarchs of the heretics.¹⁰ Today, so Hofmann, we see that many theologians refashion the articles of faith according to carnal wisdom and interpret the Scriptures according to philosophy. Hofmann, on the other hand, teaches his students that Luther's theology is superior, because he drove out the leaven of the scholastics and draws only from Scripture.¹¹

In thesis 12, philosophy is lauded *in its area*, but then in thesis 13 the opposition between philosophy and theology is stated. In thesis 15, Hofmann takes up Luther's rejection of the identity of truth in philosophy and theology, because such an identity would mean that the articles of faith would be judged by reason. This contradicts 2 Corinthians 10:15.¹² Hofmann thinks that Calvinists are not able to understand the specific language of the words of institution as "mystical or unusual

⁸ Sparr, "Die Schulphilosophie in den lutherischen Territorien," 560. A syllogism is a form of argument that deduces a conclusion based on two premises. For example: All A is B, but all B is C, therefore all A is C.

⁹ Daniel Hofmann, *Propositiones de deo, et Christi tum persona tum officio* (Helmstedt: haeredes Iacobi Lucij, 1598).

¹⁰ "Quantò verò magis excolitur ratio humana philosophicis studiis, tantò armatior prodit, & quò seipsam amat impensius, eò Theologiam inuadit atrocius, & errores pingit speciosius. Unde Paulus ad Coloss. 2 Philosophiam depraedantem discipulos Apostolorum agnouit, & ad Gal. 5. inter opera carnis reiecti haereses, quod primitiua Ecclesia per experientiam edocta sic explicauit: Philosophos esse haereticorum patriarchas." Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. A2r.

¹¹ Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. A2v.

¹² Thesis 15 states: "Dominus Lutherus tum erudite tum piè scripsit: Sorbona mater errorum pessimè definiuit, idem esse verum in philosophia & Theologia, impieque damnauit eos qui contrarium disputauerint. *Nam hac sentential abominabilis* docuit captiuare articulos fidei, sub iudicium rationis humanae. Hoc erat aliud nihil quàm coelom & terram includere in suo centro aut grano milij. Cùm contra Paulus 2 Cor. 10. Ver. 5 doceat, captiuandum esse omnem intellectum (*πάν τὸ νοήμα*) haud dubiè & philosophiam in obsequium Christi. Haec scitè et sanctè Lutherus." Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B2v.

pronouncements” (*ennunciaciones mysticas seu inusitatas*) because of their use of philosophy. This leads them to reduce the words of institution to tropes.¹³ Therefore, Luther is right, that logic and philosophy need to stay in their sphere, and the kingdom of faith has a new language of its own.¹⁴

This independence from philosophy means also that language about God is neither univocal, as Duns Scotus said, nor is it analogical, as Aquinas said, because God and the creatures are not of the same nature and essence, and there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite. Rather, proper names of God are incommunicable to creatures, and anything that is said properly about creatures is applied only metaphorically to God, as Isaiah 42:8 shows.¹⁵

IV. The Disputation *Pro duplici veritate Lutheri a philosophis impugnata*

Hofmann is most famous or infamous for his defense of double truth that he developed at length in the disputation “In favor of Luther’s double truth, which was attacked by the philosophers,” published in Magdeburg in 1600.¹⁶

The disputation starts with the “occasion for the dispute,” which is the fifteenth thesis of the disputation of Pfaffrad. Hofmann claims Luther’s disputation on John 1:14 of 1539¹⁷ for his position and makes a table contrasting the opinion of the Sorbonne and of Luther. Luther’s argument is that the position of the Sorbonne puts the articles of faith under the judgment of reason, whereas Paul teaches that the mind has to be held captive to Christ (2 Cor 10:5), and that means that philosophy has to be in submission to theology. He contrasts this with the position of philosophers who follow Johann Caselius (1533–1613), who count this saying of Luther among the shameful things (*ad pudenda*) that he said.¹⁸

Hofmann starts with Psalm 116:11: Every man is a liar, therefore no man is truthful. This position is further corroborated with Psalm 62:9. All men lack the

¹³ “contententes, quod enunciaciones mysticas seu inusitatas, oporteat per tropum reduci ad Logicas.” Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B2v, thesis 18.

¹⁴ Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B3r, thesis 20.

¹⁵ Hofmann, *Propositiones*, fol. B3v, theses 26 and 27.

¹⁶ Daniel Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate Lutheri a philosophis impugnata, & ad pudendorum locum ablegatâ* (Magdeburg: Andreas Dunckerus, 1600). On the topic of double truth, see L. Hödl, “Doppelte Wahrheit,” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 286–287; Martin Pine, “Double Truth,” *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 31–37.

¹⁷ Martin Luther, *The Disputation concerning the Passage: “The Word Was Made Flesh”* (1539): vol. 38, pp. 235–277, in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), hereafter AE.

¹⁸ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate Lutheri*, fol. A3r. Johann Caselius was a professor of philosophy at Helmstedt.

truth. Further, Psalm 5:9 says of the impious: “Truth is not in their mouth; their heart is vain.” Additionally, according to 1 John 2:4, an unbeliever is a liar and the truth is not in him. Therefore, when all men are called liars—when there is no truth in their mouth, heart, or throat—then also all truth according to the wisdom of the world and the philosophers is abolished.¹⁹ This means that in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle there is only a carnal truth, since they are not reborn and thus lack all spiritual truth. Furthermore, the devil, who is called the ruler of the world, rules also the non-regenerate philosophers. Christians and non-Christians do not have the same *intellectus* (“mind, understanding”). And although the unbeliever is very refined through philosophy, nevertheless he is totally swollen up with a wisdom that is stupidity before God.

But what about the fact that believer and unbeliever can have the same knowledge and (historical) faith? This is where his opponents sweat the most, trying to maintain the identity of thoughts (*noemata*) in believers and unbelievers, so that these thoughts do not need to be kept captive in the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). Hofmann proposes this syllogism:

Whatever wholly is lost through the fall of Adam has not stayed in any way. Truth, goodness, righteousness, holiness, which are certainly spiritual goods, have been lost through the fall of Adam. Therefore nothing of those goods has remained. The minor premise is proved in Ap II from Eph 4:24. This teaching was repeated in the *Corpus doctrinae Iulium* and the *Book of Concord*, on the sin of origin [FC I].²⁰

¹⁹ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. A3v.

²⁰ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. [A4]v. Here Hofmann quotes the Formula positively, even though he is against it in other respects. Hofmann might be thinking of FC SD I 11: “That not only is original sin (in human nature) such a complete lack of all good in spiritual, divine matters, but also that at the same time it replaces the lost image of God in the human being with a deep-seated, evil, horrible, bottomless, unfathomable, and indescribable corruption of the entire human nature and of all its powers, particularly of the highest, most important powers of the soul, in mind, heart, and will. Ever since the fall, the human being inherits an inborn evil way of doing things, an internal impurity of the heart, mind, and way of thinking from Adam. Following its highest powers and in light of reason, this fallen heart is by nature diametrically opposed to God and his highest commandments. Indeed, it is hostile to God, particularly in regard to divine spiritual matters,” *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 533–534. The *Corpus doctrinae Iulium* is a collection of confessions by Duke Julius for his duchy that contains the ecumenical creeds, the Augsburg Confession and its Apology, the catechisms of Luther, the Smalcald Articles and the Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, a treatise by Urbanus Rhegius entitled “How one should speak prudently and without scandal of the most prominent articles of Christian doctrine” (Urbanus Rhegius, *Preaching the Reformation: The Homiletical Handbook of Urbanus Rhegius*, trans. Scott Hendrix, Reformation Texts with Translation 2 [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2003]), and finally a “Wohlgegründeter Bericht / von den fürnemsten Artikeln Christlicher Lere / so zu unsern zeiten streitig worden sein” by Martin Chemnitz (cf. J. A. O. Preus, *The Second Martin: The Life and*

Hofmann now goes on to prove with more syllogisms that whatever is called good in civil righteousness is not good in the same sense of the goodness that has been lost. In the same way, goodness, righteousness, and holiness in fallen man are called flesh (Gal 5:17); they are not the same as goodness, righteousness, and holiness in the children of God. Since those who lack the glory of God are the enemies of God, they do not partake in the spiritual goods (2 Cor 6:14–15). The consequence of all this is that there is no identity of the knowledge of God in pagans and Christians, or those who are outside of the grace of Christ and those who have been regenerated through the grace of God. This, so said Hofmann, is a necessary conclusion if one does not want to overthrow the foundation of Christianity. One, therefore, has to distinguish carefully between the truth of philosophy and the truth of theology, between carnal and spiritual truth, or between the pagans and the Christians, the non-regenerate and the regenerate, the unclean and the clean.²¹

Such a radical view of the effects of original sin means that Homer, Aristotle, and Horace are slaves of the devil. Contrary to this fact, Johannes Caselius makes them to be enlightened by the eternal divine mind, friends of God, and heroes elevated to the most Holy.²² But God who is the truth did send his Son, Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and sends the Spirit of truth who will lead in all truth. Thus, the gifts that have been lost are restored without philosophy, even against reason. For the wisdom of reason holds this restitution of truth to be foolishness.²³

The opponents make the following argument against this: The true agrees with the true, so that God's truth does not contradict God's truth; but the true philosophy and theology is truth and something from God. Therefore, the true philosophy does not contradict the divine truth or the teachings of theologians.²⁴ Hofmann answers that the true does agree with the true, if one maintains the distinctions in regard to "true." The truth does not destroy truth, right again, if one looks at truths under the same aspect (*ratio*). But since the carnal truth is lie

Theology of Martin Chemnitz [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1994], 165). Article 4 of this document deals with original sin and states that original sin is "a deep, evil corruption of nature and all powers of man, as the Smalcald Articles refer to it, where man is completely averted from God and his will and thoroughly warped towards everything which is contrary to the divine will, besides a contrarian disgust against God, in all his upper and lower powers in reason, heart, and will, so that every intention of the thoughts of his heart before regeneration by the Holy Spirit is only evil all the time" (*Corpus Doctrinae, Das ist Die Summa Form vnd fuerbilde der reinen Christlichen Lehre aus der heiligen Goettlichen Schrift der Propheten vnd Aposteln zusammen gezogen* [Wolfenbüttel: Conrad Horn, 1576], 70). The similarity of the language to FC SD I 11 is striking.

²¹ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B1r.

²² "indiget Sanctissimi." Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B1v.

²³ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B2r.

²⁴ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B2v–B3r.

in spiritual things, it is necessary that it is destroyed by the spiritual truth, even if the carnal truth is loftiness (*sublimitas*), a fortification (*munitio*), reasoning (*ratiocinatio*).²⁵ The argument is, therefore, really with the minor premise: “But the true philosophy and theology is truth and something from God.” Even the perfect and pure philosophy—which is neither that of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, nor Pythagoras—is still to be distinguished from the wisdom of God. How great, he asks, is the distance between philosophy and theology, between a human wisdom, however perfect, and the divine wisdom? Beyond that, there is the question of the status of philosophical truth in those not reborn, who lack the spiritual truth, whose mind is totally unclean and crooked. The truth in the non-regenerate is not the pure truth but truth held down in injustice (Rom 1:18). The scholastics and Jesuits see clearer than his philosophical adversaries. For they exclude reason from sin and therefore think that there can be cooperation of the ability to reason and of philosophy with the Holy Spirit.²⁶ But what about the natural knowledge of God? Hofmann agrees that God manifests what can be known of God (though not God himself) in such a way that man is to conclude from the effect to the cause. What does the mind of the unregenerate do with the object that is put before him? The apostle says they “they hold down the truth in injustice” (Rom 1:18). Their mind and conscience (or consciousness) is polluted, and even those who say that they know, deny it by their deeds (Titus 1:15–16).²⁷ If truth is the conformity of the intellect with an object, then the philosophers have to consider that in the intellect of fallen men resides the denial of truth.

Hofmann does not deny that the unregenerate knows something. The unregenerate can know the truth of geometry, for example. But such knowledge is far removed from spiritual truth. It cannot be said that the unbeliever holds down the truth of Euclid in unrighteousness.²⁸ If this distinction between spiritual truth and the truth of geometry (for example) is not upheld, the danger of Pelagianism arises. This is the reason why, among Christians, philosophers who are not Pelagians are rare. Hofmann is, thus, not ready to concede that philosophy and the heavenly truth are the same. The second syllogism of Hofmann’s opponents goes like this:

If a true statement does not contradict another true statement, then those statements which oppose faith are not true according to philosophy. But true does not contradict true. Therefore the things that conflict with faith are not true according to philosophy.²⁹

²⁵ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B3r.

²⁶ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B3v.

²⁷ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. B4r.

²⁸ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C1r.

²⁹ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C1v.

Hofmann does believe that what is true in philosophy can contradict a theological statement that is true. Philosophy says that a body is in one place. Theology, though, contradicts and states that Christ wants his body to be in heaven and on earth when the Lord's Supper is celebrated. (Note that Hofmann does not believe in the ubiquity of Christ's body).³⁰ The theodicy problem is another example: If God exists, he is good. But he who permits bad things to happen to good people, and good things to happen to bad people, cannot be good. Therefore there is no God. "Therefore what is very true in reason is false in faith."³¹ Therefore, wherever Scripture contradicts the principles and conclusions of philosophy, there one ought to believe the word of God and not philosophy.³²

V. Hofmann's Consistency or Inconsistency

In the secondary literature, the question of Hofmann's consistency and clarity is raised. Did Hofmann denounce philosophy absolutely, or did he denounce philosophy only when it overstepped its limits? He asserts the latter, but he sounds quite often as if he asserted the former.³³

Friedrich mentions that here fundamental problems of Lutheran theology arise that are not solved by Hofmann. First, Hofmann does not reflect on the possibility that the regenerate uses his reason to develop a Christian philosophy. Second, with the identification of natural and carnal in the unregenerate, everything that fallen man does is carnal, and there is potentially no room for a legitimate ordering of worldly affairs by reason.³⁴ Third, there is the problem of the identity of man through regeneration: How can it be that man is completely changed and is still the same person? Does that not mean that something perdures? And if this is true, then this something is not changed by the new birth.

VI. Hofmann and Luther

Hofmann claimed Luther's disputation on John 1:14 (1539) for his position. But does he do so rightly? The opening theses of the disputation are as follows:

³⁰ Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C2r.

³¹ "Fortiter igitur verum in ratione, falsum est in fide." Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C2v.

³² Hofmann, *Pro duplici veritate*, fol. C3r.

³³ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 263: "Insgesamt jedenfalls schwankt Hofmanns Bewertung von *philosophia* bzw. *ratio* unglücklich zwischen ihrer Beschränkung auf anerkannte Ausübung in den *externa* und einem Verständnis von *philosophia* als Inbegriff sündigen Handelns des Menschen. Vielleicht wollte Hofmann tatsächlich nur die Scheidung von Vernunft und Glauben scharf betonen und keine Totalverwerfung der *ratio* aussprechen. Sollte dem so sein, so hat er diesen Standpunkt aber vielfach schlecht oder überhaupt nicht durchgehalten."

³⁴ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 263–264.

1. Although the saying “Every truth is in agreement with every truth,” is to be upheld, nevertheless, what is true in one field of learning is not always true in other fields of learning. 2. In theology it is true that the Word was made flesh; in philosophy the statement is simply impossible and absurd. 3. The declaration, “God is man,” is not less, but even more contradictory than if you would say, “Man is an ass.” 4. The Sorbonne, the mother of errors, has very incorrectly defined that truth is the same in philosophy and theology. 5. And has impiously condemned those who have argued to the contrary. 6 For by making this abominable statement, it was taught that articles of faith are subject to the judgment of human reason. 7. This is nothing other than attempting to enclose heaven and earth in their own center or in a grain of millet. 8. Paul, on the contrary, teaches that all thought (no doubt this also includes philosophy) is to be taken captive to the obedience of Christ [II Cor. 10:5].³⁵

These theses certainly sound as if Luther subscribes to a strong theory of double truth.³⁶ On one hand, there is theology; on the other, philosophy, and contradictory statements can both be true at the same time in the same way. But the subsequent

³⁵ Martin Luther, *The Disputation Concerning the Passage: ‘The Word was Made Flesh’* (1539), AE 38:239; *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), vol. 39/2:3.1–4.7 (hereafter WA). “1. Etsi tenendum est, quod dicitur: Omne verum vero consonat, tamen idem non est verum in diversis professionibus. 2. In theologia verum est, verbum esse carnem factum, in philosophia simpliciter impossibile et absurdum. 3. Ne minus, imo magis disparata est praedicatio: Deus est homo, quam si dicas: Homo est asinus. 4. Sorbona, mater errorum, pessime definivit, idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia. 5. Impieque damnavit eos, qui contrarium disputaverunt. 6. Nam hac sententia abominabili docuit captivare articulos fidei sub iudicium rationis humanae. 7. Hoc erat aliud nihil, quam coelum et terram includere in suo centro aut grano milii. 8. Cum contra Paulus doceat, captivandum esse omnem intellectum (haud dubie et philosophiam) in obsequium Christi.”

³⁶ In connection with these theses, there is an extensive discussion on the historical question: When did the Sorbonne define that the same is true in philosophy and theology? There is no such definition explicitly; rather, Luther is summarizing the medieval theological position that expressed the Christian faith in philosophical categories and the rejection of any other methodology. “According to Luther’s opinion this programme . . . leads to a destructive captivity of the articles of the faith in human reason (th. 7) and is comparable with the impossible enterprise, to include heaven and earth in a grain of millet.” “Der Satz ‘dasselbe ist wahr in Philosophie und Theologie’ ist auf diesem Hintergrund nicht als Definition der Sorbonne zu verstehen. Es ist kaum vorstellbar, daß sie einen solchen Satz definiert hat. Vielmehr benennt Luther damit polemisch einen wichtigen Programmpunkt der sich seit dem 13. Jahrhundert durchsetzenden und bald vorherrschenden, thomistisch beeinflussten Schultheologie, die die theologische Überlieferung in philosophischen Kategorien ausdrückt und jedes anders geardete programmatische Vorgehen verurteilt (These 5). Luthers Ansicht nach führt dieses Programm, das er mit der Sorbonne als Exponentin dieses Vorgehens in Verbindung bringt, aber zu zerstörerischer Gefangenschaft der Glaubensartikel in der menschlichen Vernunft (These 7) und ist mit dem unmöglichen Unterfangen zu vergleichen, Himmel und Erde in ein Hirsekorn einzuschließen.” Stefan Streiff, “*Novis linguis loqui*.”: *Martin Luthers Disputation über Joh 1,14 “verbum caro factum est” aus dem Jahr 1539* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 92.

theses show that Luther is not simply holding contradictory beliefs, and he explains what he means by the statement that what is true in philosophy is not true in theology:

25. Or this one: All flesh is a creature. The word is not a creature. Therefore, the Word is not flesh. 26. In these and similar statements the syllogism is a most excellent form, but it is useless with regard to the matter itself. 27. Therefore, in articles of faith one must have recourse to another dialectic and philosophy, which is called the word of God and faith. 28. Here we must take a stand and the arguments of philosophy drawing the opposite conclusions must be regarded as the vain croaking of frogs. 29. Nevertheless, we are also compelled to affirm with regard to other arts and sciences that the same thing is not true in all of them. 30. For it is false and an error in the area of weights to say that weights can be attached to a mathematical point or line. 31. It is false and an error in the area of measurement to measure a pint with the measure of a foot or an ell. 32. It is false and an error in the area of linear measurements to compare them with an ounce or a pound. 33. Yes, it is false and an error to say that a straight line and a curved one are proportionate to one another. 34. This applies also to those who square the circle, although they are not speaking wrongly when they call a straight and a curved line both a line. 35. Nevertheless, it is false if they want to make the straight line proportionate to the curved line. 36. Finally, something is true in one area of philosophy which is, nonetheless, false in another area of philosophy.³⁷

Luther does not simply affirm a double truth. Rather, as the theses show, he denies the omniscience of philosophy and maintains that philosophy is not a universal doctrine. To put it differently, the logic of theology has to be learned through the language of Scripture. The attempt to judge the truth of theological statements philosophically is as absurd as trying to measure volume by feet or trying to measure

³⁷ AE 38:241. WA 39/2:4.5–28: “25. Nec ista: Omnis caro est creatura. Verbum non est creatura. Ergo verbum non est caro. 26. In his et similibus Syllogismus est forma optima, sed nihil ad materiam. 27. Eundem ergo est ad aliam dialecticam et philosophiam in articulis fidei, quae vocatur verbum Dei et fides. 28. Hic sistendum est, et disputationes philosophiae contrarium concludentes pro ranarum coaxatione habendae. 29. Cogimur tamen etiam in aliis artibus negare, quod idem sit verum in omnibus. 30. Falsum est enim et error in genere ponderum, puncto et linea mathematica appendi posse pondera. 31. Falsum est et error in genere mensurarum, sextarium pedali vel ulnari mensura metiri. 32. Falsum est et error in genere linearum uncialis vel libralis comparatio. 33. Quin falsum et error est, quod linea recta et curva sint proportionales. 34. Et quadratores circuli, licet non falsum dicant, dum lineam rectam et curvam vocant utramque lineam. 35. Tamen hoc falsum est, si lineae rectae et curvae proportionem facere volunt. 36. Denique aliquid est verum in una parte philosophiae, quod tamen falsum est in alia parte philosophiae.”

geometrical figures in pounds.³⁸ Luther does not, therefore, claim for theology rules different than those in any other discipline in which statements are made.³⁹ Rather, Luther sees multiple areas of human life that function according to their own subject matter and whose criteria for truth are internal. The omniscience of reason is not denied as a special pleading for theology, but because the claim of the omniscience of reason is itself not reasonable.⁴⁰

Luther does not teach a double truth. What he teaches is that different areas of investigation have their own approach and that the truth of a proposition is dependent on its context and situation and cannot be simply universalized.⁴¹ For Luther, this is a *rational* statement. The problem of scholastic theology is thus not its rationalism, but its *irrationalism* because of its wrong concept of reason. Only by distinguishing the sphere of theology and the sphere of philosophy from each other can the integrity of theology be maintained.

³⁸ "Mehr können und wollen die Beispiele der disp. Joh 1:14 nicht sagen als dies: Die verschiedenen Gattungen sind inkommensurabel, sie haben ihre eigenen Voraussetzungen, die nicht in andere Gattungen übertragbar sind. Wird ein Hohlmaß mit einem Längenmaß gemessen, ist die Aussage falsch oder besser sinnlos (These 31). Ebenso ist der Vergleich von Linien mit Unzen oder Pfunden sinnlos (These 32)." Streiff, "*Novis linguis loqui*," 100.

³⁹ "38. Thus, in particular liberal arts, or rather crafts, if you look them over, you will never discover that the same thing is true in all of them. 39. How much less it is possible for the same thing to be true in philosophy and theology, for the difference between them is infinitely greater than that between liberal arts and crafts" (AE 38:242). "39. Quanto minus potest idem esse verum in philosophia et theologia quarum distinctio in infinitum maior est, quam artium et operum. 40. Rectius ergo fecerimus, si dialectica seu philosophia in sua sphaera relictis discamus loqui novis linguis in regno fidei extra omnem sphaeram" (WA 39/2:5.31–34).

⁴⁰ "An den einzelnen Gattungen des Maßwesens läßt sich also evident darstellen, was als Unterscheidungskriterium zwischen Theologie und Philosophie nicht unmittelbar einleuchtet, dort aber der Ansicht Luthers nach ebenso gilt: Die einzelnen Gattungen sind inkommensurable, begrenzte Sinnzusammenhänge eigener Art, deren Regeln eingehalten werden müssen, wenn sinnvolle Aussagen resultieren sollen. Die Übertragung von Kategorien einer Gattung in die andere führt zu Sinnlosigkeit. Die Inkommensurabilität der Sinnzusammenhängen besteht also darin, daß Kategorien nicht von dem einen in den anderen Zusammenhang übertragbar sind." Streiff, "*Novis linguis loqui*" 101–102.

⁴¹ "Mit dem Nachweis der Inkommensurabilität von Sinnzusammenhängen wird klar, daß eine Aussage kontradiktorischen Characters als Funktion eines jeweiligen Sinnzusammenhanges verstanden werden kann und somit ihren kontradiktorischen Charakter verliert. Die Formel der doppelten Wahrheit büßt dort ihren Sinn ein, wo ein Widerspruch nicht mehr auf derselben Ebene vorliegt, das heißt wo das Herkommen eines Widerspruchs als aus einer andern Sphäre, einem andern Gebiet, Horizont oder Sinnzusammenhang stammend erklärt werden kann." Streiff, "*Novis linguis loqui*," 112.

VII. Later Lutheran Theologians

Jacob Martini

Jacob Martini (1570–1649), professor at Wittenberg, wrote a massive defense of philosophy in general and the value of philosophy for theology in the context of a somewhat later controversy that bears a lot of similarity to the Hofmann controversy.⁴² Jacob Martini was a student of Cornelius Martini and of Daniel Hofmann. In the 1200 pages of his *Mirror of Intellect, That Is, Thorough and Irrefutable Report, What Intellect and Its Perfection, Called Philosophy, Is, How Far It Extends and Especially What Use It Has in Matters of Religion*, published in Wittenberg in 1618, he mentions Daniel Hofmann only peripherally, one time positively, stating first that Hofmann did acknowledge the natural knowledge of God, as did Pfaffrad; second, that Hofmann did lecture on logic himself. But as far as I can see, Martini does not engage Hofmann directly, though some of the arguments used by Hofmann are used by the positions Martini attacks. Some words on the history: Wencel Schilling (died June 28, 1637), who had received his master's degree in 1614, had published the book *Visitatio Ecclesiae Metaphysicae* in 1616 in Magdeburg, an attack on the mixing of metaphysics and theology. This book got Schilling into trouble with Cornelius Martini. The university of Helmstedt then charged Schilling with slander because he had attacked philosophy as a satanic art. A legal battle ensued that ended with the expulsion of Schilling from the university and banishment from Helmstedt in 1619.⁴³ But Schilling had also attacked Jacob Martini in 1616 and continued to publish polemics under his own name and under pseudonyms. Schilling was supported by Andreas Cramer (1582–1640), pastor at St. Johannis in Magdeburg.⁴⁴

Martini's position is that one has to distinguish between the natural light of reason, the light of grace, and the false light. The natural light of reason is not extinguished after the fall. Reason or intellect or the natural light contains the *notitia principorum primorum* or *koinai ennoiai*, the basic principles of logic, such as the principle of the excluded third. It also includes the laws of arithmetic, such as that two times two is four. Last, but not least, reason refers to the knowledge of natural law that is implanted in man. The light of grace is the light of the gospel or faith. The false light is man's arrogant self-conceit, the result of original sin. Martini claims

⁴² Jacob Martini, *Vernunftspiegel Das ist / Gründlicher vnnd vnwidertreiblicher Bericht / was die Vernunft / sampt derselbigen perfectio, Philosophia genandt / sey / wie weit sie sich erstrecke / vnd fürnemlich was für einen gebrauch sie habe in Religions Sachen* (Wittenberg: In verleckung Samuel Selfisch Erben, 1618).

⁴³ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 142–149.

⁴⁴ Friedrich, *Die Grenzen der Vernunft*, 180.

Luther's support for this distinction.⁴⁵ In conversion, the natural light is not extinguished by the light of grace, but it is lit above it. The false light, though, is extinguished. When the natural light is enlightened through the light of grace, then it knows God in a spiritual light.⁴⁶

Martini is facing the same issues that were controversial in Helmstedt: In what sense is man totally corrupt in all his faculties, and does this imply that fallen man is outside of the truth in everything he thinks and does? For Martini, the fact of the natural knowledge of God—which includes for him not only the knowledge that God is, but also that he is one, infinite, good, to be worshiped, and so on—and the knowledge of natural law establishes the basis of philosophy as a discipline that knows the truth. Philosophy is for him “a doctrine or knowledge, by which we contemplate or investigate all things that God has put before us in this world to contemplate or investigate, and at the same time to habituate and train our practices.”⁴⁷ Thus, philosophy is the exercise of the noetic abilities capable of knowing the things of this world—including what God has put into this world to know about him. But philosophy also pertains to actions, thus fostering the virtues in man. This knowledge can be ignored and abused by fallen man, but it is still possible.

But philosophy is also useful for theology. The language arts of grammar, dialectics,⁴⁸ and rhetoric (including poetry) are used in theology, as are history and mathematics (namely, in establishing chronologies). But also metaphysics is of benefit for the theologian. If one wants to understand what is meant when God is called “being” (*ens*) or an “essence” (*essentia*), then this leads one to metaphysics. And Scripture itself calls God “being,” namely in Exodus 3:14; Revelation 1:7–8; and 11:17. Metaphysics helps one to recognize that the term *ens* is not used univocally for God and created beings, but analogically. Metaphysics teaches the right division of things (such as how many parts there are in Baptism). Metaphysics teaches what “truth” is and what truth means referring to things, concepts, and words. It teaches what “goodness” is—as a transcendental, as a natural good, or as a moral good. Disputations about whether original sin is a privation or thing are metaphysical. Metaphysics helps us to develop a correct understanding of God's omnipotence and distinguish between active and passive potential (*potentia activa* and *potentia*

⁴⁵ Church Postil, sermon on John 1:1–14, WA 10/1.1:180.4–247.3 (AE 75:277–316); the discussion on natural light, WA 10/1.1:203.3–207.11 (AE 75:290–293). Luther does have the distinction between the three lights, and his statement that the light of reason is a piece of the true light if it comes to the true knowledge of God opens the door for a positive view of reason in the regenerate.

⁴⁶ Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 8–11.

⁴⁷ Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 732.

⁴⁸ For the use of logic in theology, see Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 1138–1146.

passiva), absolute and ordinate power (*potentia absoluta* and *ordinata*).⁴⁹ Metaphysics is here a fundamental discipline whose truth can be known by reason and thus, similar to the language arts, is helpful in articulating the faith. It is actually necessary for the educated pastor who wants to have a deeper knowledge and the ability to refute false teachers. For that reason, Martini wants all future pastors to study philosophy.

Abraham Calov

Abraham Calov (1612–1686) mentions Daniel Hofmann in question 14 of the prolegomena of his *Systema locorum theologicorum*, “Is theology contrary to philosophy?”⁵⁰ Calov mentions also that Reformed theologian Nicolaus Vedel (1596–1642) ascribes the theory of double truth to almost all Lutherans, quoting Luther’s disputation on John 1:14. For Calov, Luther does not assert double truth; rather, Luther wants to state that things revealed are neither true nor false in philosophy, because philosophy does not know anything of them. If philosophy states that a proposition like “the word became flesh” is absurd, then the point is the abuse of philosophy, not philosophy in itself. The reasons why there is no contradiction between philosophy and theology according to Calov are as follows: because truth agrees with truth, it does not conflict with itself; the origin of philosophical and natural knowledge is in God; philosophy leads men to the knowledge of God; and finally, philosophy is praised in Scripture. The references Calov quotes for the praise of philosophy in Scripture are statements concerning; physics (Job 38; Ps 19:2; 148:1); astronomy (Is 40:26; Ecclesiasticus 43:1); music (2 Chr 5:12–13; Ps 150); arithmetic (because there are calculations in Scripture); geometry and architecture through the buildings described; and practical philosophy because of moral precepts. Philosophy is thus taken in a sense that includes the seven liberal arts, rather than “philosophy” in the modern sense.

According to Calov, philosophy is useful for theology, not only because of logic in regard to argumentation and methodically in regard to analytic or synthetic method, but also because it helps to understand the Scriptures in physical matters—here again philosophy encompasses what modern authors would call the natural sciences—and ethics, and because it can provide secondary confirmation in theological arguments.

Finally, the position of the proponents of double truth is totally absurd according to Calov. If Hofmann is right that anything that the unregenerate says is

⁴⁹ Martini, *Vernunftspiegel*, 1220–1225.

⁵⁰ *Utrum Theologia contrarietur Philosophiae?* Abraham Calov, *Systema locorum theologicorum*, vol. I (Witebergae: Sumptibus Andreae Hartmanni Bibliopolae, 1655), 67–75.

false, then suddenly it is false when he says God exists or honor your father and mother. But these statements are obviously true, whoever says them.⁵¹

VIII. Conclusion

The controversy in Helmstedt did not change the course of history. But it shows that the increased confidence in philosophy in post-Reformation Lutheranism did not happen without resistance. Hofmann's example indicates that the resistance was theologically motivated. The radical understanding of the sinfulness of man made it difficult to speak of an untainted remnant in man capable of knowing the truth. The opponents of Hofmann, on the other hand, claimed that reason was competent in things of this world and in certain respects also in regard to God because of natural revelation. Aristotelianism was seen as *the* rational philosophy by Cornelius Martini and his students. The victory of Aristotelianism over other philosophical alternatives and the adoption of Aristotelian metaphysics by Lutheran philosophers and theologians, a metaphysics then universally plausible, helped them to articulate the Lutheran position in their time. But Aristotelianism soon was no longer the universally accepted philosophy, and a philosophy and theology connected to it seemed to be hopelessly outdated. The question of what man can know by natural reason is a question that has not come to a final resolution, and therefore theology would be ill-advised to build theological statements on philosophical "truths" or adopt a philosophical system *in toto*. But neither are theology and philosophy completely separated. Theology has used philosophical tools and concepts in an eclectic way to communicate the truth of the Christian faith in its context.⁵² And as the discussion in Lutheran Orthodoxy shows, a wholesale rejection of the ministerial use of reason can lead to inconsistency, since at least the rules of argument are a rational feature of theology. The relation between Lutheran theology and philosophy remains one of tension, since theology accepts philosophy

⁵¹ Hofmann's position is not quite so absurd if the meaning of such statements depends on the context of the unbeliever. When an unbeliever says "God," does the word have the same meaning in his context as when the Christian says it? There are obvious differences, but if there would be no overlap in meaning, then there would be no communication possible between believers and unbelievers on "God" and, if Christianity determines one's whole life, on anything. The commonality of language between believers and unbelievers speaks against Hofmann's thesis.

⁵² "Insofern bedeutet die angebliche Hellenisierung gerade nicht das, was man negativ damit gemeint hat, sondern einen Prozeß kritisch-selektiver Inanspruchnahme der spätantiken Hilfsmittel, um das christliche Proprium plausibel zu formulieren. (Daß diese Plausibilität zeitgebunden ist, versteht sich angesichts der Beanspruchung konkreter philosophischer Schemata)," Wolf-Dieter Hauschild, "Das trinitarische Dogma von 381 als Ergebnis verbindlicher Konsensusbildung," *Glaubensbekenntnis und Kirchengemeinschaft: Das Modell des Konzils von Konstantinopel (381)*, ed. K. Lehmann and W. Pannenberg (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 42.

as a rational discipline in its sphere and uses it in its task of a contemporary explication of the truth of the Christian faith, but rejects philosophy when it oversteps its realm of competence.